



Testimony
Betsy Gara, Executive Director
Connecticut Council of Small Towns
Before the Labor & Public Employees Committee
March 3, 2016

The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) supports **HB-5372, AN ACT CONCERNING FIREFIGHTERS AND DISABILITY INSURANCE POLICIES**, which requires a study of the feasibility of creating a disability insurance program for uniformed members of paid and volunteer fire departments.

COST has recently been invited to participate in discussions with stakeholders to determine whether a compromise can be reached on issues involving firefighters and certain cancers. Although the discussions have been productive, it is critical that a resolution can be found which does not overburden our communities and property taxpayers.

We are also concerned that the ongoing state budget deficit may have serious implications for the state's small towns and cities. Until the state adopts a budget, it is unclear what that impact will be.

Clearly, any cuts in municipal aid will disrupt the delivery of critical services at the local level and/or lead to increases in property taxes on our residents and businesses. Given this budget uncertainty, we must be very cautious about adopting any new laws that will impose significant costs on municipalities.

We therefore agree that efforts to develop an appropriate mechanism for addressing concerns regarding firefighters and certain cancers would benefit from further study, including detailed cost projections, as called for in HB-5372.

COST will continue to participate in discussions regarding this issue and we remain hopeful that agreement may be reached this session. However, we must carefully consider the cost impact of any such proposal on our municipalities.

COST is an advocacy organization committed to giving small towns a strong voice in the legislative process. Its members are Connecticut towns with populations of less than 30,000. COST champions the major policy needs and concerns of Connecticut's suburban and rural towns.